

THOUGHTS
ON THE
CANCER
OF THE
BREAST.



BY

GEORGE BELL,

SURGEON, AT REDDITCH.

*Ex his enim similibusque
sæpe curandi nova ratio ducenda est.*

CELSUS.

BIRMINGHAM:

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E X P L A N A T I O N
OF THE
P L A T E.

FIGURE I.

- A. A cistern made of strong tin plate, to hold water for bathing.
- B. B. B. An engine made of the hardest pewter, or strong tin plate, to circulate the water, and raise it up when a flat breast is bathed.
- C. An opening in the cover of the cistern, through which a prominent breast is put into the water, and over which a flat breast should be laid: the edge of this should be turned downward, round a piece of thick wire, to prevent it from hurting the patient.

FIG-

FIGURE II.

A piece of tin plate made in the form of a cylinder, to hang down from the opening in the canvas into the bath, when a flat breast is bathed, to exclude cold air, and prevent the water from spreading farther than is wanted.

FIGURE III.

An apparatus to keep the patient dry, when the syringe is used, or the breast is bathed while she sits on a chair: it is made thus, a piece of flat tin plate is excavated at one end, and rounded at the other, from one corner of the excavation round to the other, there is a rising border flanting inwards, this holds the water till it falls into a tube at the depending part which conveys it into a pot or pail set to receive it; the edge of the plate, where it is excavated, is turned round a piece of thick wire, which prevents all uneasiness in the application of it; and as a further security, some soft linen is commonly put between the body of the patient and this instrument.

When a prominent breast is bathed, the cistern should be full but not run over, by the immersion of the breast and agitation of the water.—When a flat breast is bathed, the surface of the water should be no higher than nearly up to a level with the orifices in the issuing part of the engine.—Sometimes it will be proper to put a heated iron plate under the cistern, to preserve, or to restore the necessary warmth of the water.—The cistern should be set upon a stand of such a height as will raise it up to the bed-rick or canvas on which the patient is laid: when a flat breast is bathed, it need not be so high as the engine will raise the water sufficiently to the part affected.

ERRATA.

Page 1, Note—Both sexes are liable to these; but, to the male, a disease of this sort, in that part, is a very uncommon occurrence; therefore the females are considered here as the only sufferers.

Page 13, line 15—omit the words *of it*.

—26— 1— After the words *flax seed* omit all that follows to the semicolon, and in place thereof, read *or a soft cataplasin of the powdered seeds will do very well for this purpose, as either of these is a cooling kindly, application.*

— 12— in place of *from the want, it*, read *from the want of it.*

The following paragraph having been omitted, it may not be improper to insert it here.

When the surface of the breast is hard and red, and the pain unsufferable, superficial scarification is performed on the most painful parts which are not ulcerated, immediately after this they are fomented, first with warm water, then with a watery solution of opium, a soft poultice is next applied; afterwards, in due time, the usual bathings are repeated; by these means, I have always had the pleasure to see the patient relieved

T H O U G H T S

ON THE

CANCER of the BREAST.

CANCERS in the breast*, to the consideration of which I shall confine myself in the following tract, have been always reckoned among the most painful and destructive diseases incident to human nature ; and, therefore, the greatest exertions have been used to prevent and remove them.

* Both sexes are liable to these; but to the male they are very uncommon : therefore the females are considered here as the only sufferers.

A scirrhus, the usual forerunner of cancer, is often removed with perfect safety and complete success, especially if this is done at an early period: by this prudent step, all future mischief is commonly prevented. But when a cancer is formed, art can do little more than palliate the sufferings of the patient.

The following thoughts having occurred to me on this subject, I beg leave to offer them to the faculty for trial. I hope they will be acceptable, and have no doubt but that they will be received with candour.

Some, perhaps, will be displeased, and object to them, as not being accompanied with an account of cases, &c. To these gentlemen I reply, that what they insist upon is certainly right. At the same time I tell them freely, that before I had made up my mind on this matter, I always declined to be concerned in cancerous cases; and advised patients under
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these disorders, to consult other practitioners, or apply at some hospital, where they might have more advice than mine. But since I formed the following plan, I have tried it in a few cases, in which I am not disappointed: these, though not yet ready for publication, are sufficient to warrant all that will be hereafter advanced.

To what I have said, give me leave to add, that I have no doubt but that there are, at this moment, many miserable sufferers wishing earnestly for relief, some, perhaps, for death itself, as their only deliverance! Under these considerations, and a well-grounded persuasion, that what I offer will be useful, were I to wait till I could make up a collection of complete cures, merely to support what, I trust, will appear to every candid reader to be a rational and probable means of giving that relief, I should consider such delay as nothing less than a barbarous unconcern, for the *present* pain and misery of the

afflicted; and their pressing calls for immediate help.

Having said so much by way of apology, I shall take some notice of the disease itself, and then point out a method of cure, which is proved to be a safe and certain palliative, and also attended with greater advantages.

The remote causes of cancer being still involved in great obscurity, I shall pass over some that might be named, and only mention a few, which appear to me, as the most powerful.

A languid circulation, perhaps some obstruction, in the ultimate ramifications of the arteries, and their corresponding veins: a stagnation, and, consequently, a morbid alteration of fluids, in the secretory ducts. These may be occasioned by a sudden or an intense cold, by weakness, by the sedative passions of the mind, of which hereafter, or by any other cause that impedes the circulation. In this state, the gland
being

being unhealthy in itself, and still further injured by its contents, it becomes obstructed and hardened ; or, in other words, a scirrhus is formed which often degenerates into a cancer.

Inflammation is supposed to be a cause of scirrhus and cancer; the first of these, however, seldom happens in this way; the other, I believe, is not uncommon. Inflammation itself arises from various causes, and hath terminations different from these now named: to animadvert upon them, would lead into a wide field of discussion, not immediately connected with this subject. Let it, therefore, suffice to observe, that in every inflammation a sense of heat and pain is always implied; that there is always an increased action of the vessels of the inflamed part, sometimes of the whole system; and that more blood circulates through them in this state than in health.

To apply these particulars to the present point.

point. When a cancer happens to succeed an inflammation, it may, as I apprehend, be accounted for in few words, in the following way. In proportion to the violence of pain, and the preternatural heat, which are excited in the gland, together with what happens from congestion, from extravasation, and the general disorder of the system, the part becomes susceptible of injury, and is certainly injured; but not being apt to suppurate, a cancer is formed, or an unkindly ulcer takes place, which often turns to a cancer.

External injuries, as a blow, a fall, &c. may also bring on this disease; the danger thereof will always be in proportion to the contusion and derangement of parts in the gland; and as there happens to be at the time of the accident, an unhealthy habit, a vitiated secretion, an extravasation of fluids, or an inflammation; when these, or most of them concur, the patient can hardly escape.

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A foundation may also be laid for this disease, or impending mischief greatly accelerated, if the mind is agitated by anger, or depressed by fear, grief, or anxiety. Anger disturbs the system in proportion to the degree to which it is raised, or the irritability and feelings of the person who is subject to it; and, when very violent, it will produce effects similar to those which arise from inflammation. Fear, grief, and anxiety, depress the living power, induce spasm, and impede the circulation. Under these, and according as the person is affected, the different secretions are suppressed or diminished: hence arise alterations that are hurtful, not in the fluids only, but also in the secretory organs themselves. In a word, by all these now named, the functions of nature are so much disordered, that fevers and other diseases manifestly arise therefrom: it is also well known to every intelligent and observing practitioner, that diseases which had before taken place, always turn worse, or put on some unfavourable appearance,

appearance, when the patient becomes uneasy in mind. But their baneful influence is chiefly manifest upon the delicate frame of the female sex, pregnant women and nurses especially. With the first, the effects of these passions are sometimes so powerful, that the whole system, but more particularly the uterus, and perhaps the foetus, are so much affected, probably convulsed thereby, that abortion follows, which is fatal to the child, and dangerous to the mother. In the other case, the milk becomes pernicious, or rather poisonous: this fact is so generally known, that every prudent woman forbears to put her child to the breast, under any great agitation or depression, till the passions are subsided, and she is become tolerably calm and chearful. As these are so hurtful in the cases now mentioned, there is reason to conclude, that they contribute, not a little, both to induce and increase the disorder now under consideration.

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After the gland is become scirrhus, or a vitiated ulcer hath taken place, by some further morbid process, a poison of a particular sort is formed therein, most probably from fluids that did stagnate, and possibly from the substance of the diseased gland, or scirrhus itself. This poison, whatever it may be, is the proximate cause of all the pain and ulceration which afterwards take place. This and the serous part of the blood which is thrown out upon it, form a most corrosive fluid, the effects of which will be mentioned hereafter.

The extent of a scirrhus in the breast, and how long it may continue without pain, or before it terminates in cancer, are very uncertain points. Sometimes a very small part of a gland is affected, and spreads no further; at other times, a small scirrhosity is gradually and greatly extended, by the same disorder, taking place in the adjacent glands; in other cases, a large portion of glandular substance is

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affected

affected at once. The first of these may continue for many years, perhaps through life, and the others a considerable time, without any pain or inconvenience, till some stimulus is applied; and yet not unfrequently, without any perceptible cause, the disease shall take an unfavourable turn, and be very soon in the worst state.

The symptoms of a confirmed scirrhus, and approaching cancer, are these: The part feels unusually hard, with a very unequal surface. The nipple, in place of being seated upon a round prominence, as usual, is drawn inwards, but chiefly towards the part most affected; this occasions a considerable, but unequal depression around it. At uncertain periods, sometimes sooner, sometimes later, slight pricking pains are felt: these arise from the stimulus of the poison that is now forming in the part first affected. By degrees, this poisonous fluid is increased in quantity, and becomes more virulent; in consequence thereof the pains are
more

more frequent and severe ; it spreads the disease to all around it ; it destroys all in its way ; and, when the skin is corroded, from an occult, there is an open cancer. The arteries and veins are not unfrequently destroyed ; hence arise hæmorrhages, which weaken the patient, and hasten her end. Sometimes this cancerous ichor is so exceedingly corrosive, as to corrode almost every thing in contact therewith.

Very often, in the advanced state of the disease, the glands, the membranes, and skin, being inflamed, adhere to each other, and become one morbid mass, of no certain form or bulk : from this, in the further progress of the disorder, some parts of it, more hard and painful than others, are separated, leaving deep ulcers that discharge a corrosive sanies. In other cases, there is no such separation, but a painful ulceration upon the surface, that commonly spreads wide, and runs deep into these parts.

The breast is sometimes very much, and very suddenly enlarged: this, however, is not, as I can perceive, an enlargement of the scirrhus, but of the parts around it. From the irritation of the cancer, an increased action of the vessels is excited; by this an unusual quantity of the circulating fluid is forced into parts which are yet in their natural state; hence there is an additional stimulus, and some degree of swelling is raised. At the same time, the exhalents throw out into the cellular membrane, the principal seat of this enlargement, a greater quantity than usual, of the watery part of the blood, as often happens, in other parts where stimuli are applied: beside this increased secretion, and probably, in some degree, an impeded absorption, there is also, from ruptured and corroded vessels, an effusion of serum, and even of blood, with all its parts; which may point out the true causes of this distention, and of several phenomena that occur in the disease.

The skin is often drawn inwards, and towards the diseased parts, whereby it forms a stricture upon the veins: in consequence of this, and the glandular swellings at the axilla, the circulation in them is considerably obstructed; they become greatly enlarged, and having, in this state, some distant resemblance to the feet of a crab-fish, the disease, from that appearance, has been commonly stiled a cancer.

Not unfrequently, from the same cause, and partly from the malignity of the disorder, the breast puts on a livid appearance.

Soon after the cancerous fluid is formed, part of it is absorbed, and as the lymphatics of the breast pass through some of the glands in the axilla, these are thereby unavoidably affected; and when it gets into the blood, the whole body is poisoned therewith. In a miserable state, the patient lingers on, till she is so weakened, and worn out with pain, and want of rest,

or until some part essential to life is either destroyed, or the functions of it so disordered, that the frail fabric can exist no longer.

From this short view of the disease, and the exquisite sensibility of the part affected, it must appear to any one, who reflects but for a moment, how exceedingly improper it is, to treat a cancer with caustics, or any other acrid substance. The corrosive ichor, that is continually applied to the tormented parts, needs nothing to augment its virulence; and the parts themselves, being in the greatest pain, require no additional stimulus. And yet, notwithstanding all this, from the want of a due attention to nature, which ought to be the great guide in all medical practice, the officious, or rather, the destructive hand of ignorance, is always doing something in this way. And, with sorrow, it may be said, that, excision excepted, there is not, at this day, in common practice, any one thing that can be relied on, to relieve
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unfortunate females, who too often sink under this dreadful malady.

While a scirrhus is beginning to be formed, and is at first perceived, it will be a most desirable object, to soften and disperse it. For this purpose, I shall never neglect to try, for a short time, an alterative course; having, however, always in view, the only safe and certain preventive of a greater evil. If, upon trial, the scirrhus turns softer, and is diminished, it will be a great encouragement to proceed. But where no advantage is obtained, the efficacy of alteratives should very soon be suspected, and more especially, if the least uneasiness is felt. In such cases, it will be indispensably necessary, to have an immediate recourse to the scalpel, the patient being ready, from previous admonition, to submit thereto.

For ill-conditioned ulcers, that are in danger of becoming cancerous, I propose the same
treat-

treatment as for cancers themselves. What is known to cleanse and soften, to mitigate pain, or remove it, and what disposes to heal, in the worst cases, will certainly be useful in the others.

When extirpation is improper, the following treatment will be useful :

Where the skin is prominent, and under this a darting pain and fluctuation are felt, we may be assured, that there is a collection of cancerous fluid. To confine this, can serve no good purpose; on the contrary, it will be productive of very great mischief, by infecting and corroding all around it; and, therefore, we should not hesitate a moment, but make an opening, to give it a free vent, not waiting till the skin is corroded, for, before this happens, every evil will be increasing, and the patient suffer no small misery, a great part of which might have

have been prevented, had the poison been sooner evacuated.

In place of consuming the sore with caustics, as it is usually, and, indeed, very properly called, might not some mild application, as moderately-warm water*, be useful in this case? as it will certainly dilute and wash away the burning, poisonous ichor, and thereby abate the torment it constantly occasions. Is it not worthy to be tried, if long-continued and frequently repeated applications of this sort, in immediate contact with the inflamed, hard scirrhus parts, will, in time, relax or soften, and bring them, by little and little, towards their natural state?

From what I have seen, I am disposed to believe that this is practicable: but if it can-

* What is meant by warm water here, and elsewhere, is water heated to about 105 degrees of Fahrenheit's Thermometer, very little above the natural heat of the body.

not be accomplished, we shall have the satisfaction to diminish a most painful disease.

Were I to hold out to the world a pompous and expensive preparation, it might be well received; but such practice I despise: plain warm water is what I chiefly rely upon, and recommend, as an application to cancers, from abundant experience of its salutary properties, and of its great utility in these, and other diseases analagous thereto.

Having proposed the use of warm water, it will be necessary to mention what sort of water is the best, and in what manner it is to be applied. With respect to the first, I observe, that water proper for this purpose, should be perfectly soft, and, of all others, the lightest, in regard to its specific gravity: this hath relaxing, cleansing qualities; but hard waters, impregnated with felenites, &c. have quite the opposite effects: in place of relaxing, or soft-

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ening, they always corrugate the skin, or any other part to which they are applied; and instead of removing foulness, they rather fix it where it is; therefore they are improper for this use. Waters containing any other saline or stimulating substances, should also be disused; and as the light, soft, pure element, may be had in every place, it ought to be preferred.

The application of this part of the remedy should be conducted, and varied, as may be requisite, in different cases. After an opening is made, or if the skin is already corroded, tepid water should be injected frequently and plentifully, by means of a syringe; and the more effectually to cleanse the ulcer, these openings should be enlarged occasionally, to give a sufficient vent to the poison, and that the water may have free access to the morbid parts. But, if the ulcer is open to such extent as to admit the application of it without a

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syringe,

fyringe, the best method will be to put the whole diseased part into water. This may be done very commodiously, by laying the patient prone, at full length, upon canvass fastened to a frame like a bedstead ; this canvass having an opening, to allow the breast to be immersed in a warm bath, immediately below it. If the breast is naturally flat, or is so much consumed by the disease, that it cannot reach the water, the water may be raised, and applied to it, with very nearly the same advantage as if the breast itself was immersed.

While the patient's breast is in the bath, she will be easy and comfortable, from an agreeable sensation arising from the water itself, but more especially from the dilution and evacuation of the cancerous ichor, that kept her before in a continual agony and burning heat. By the posture in which the patient is laid, the purposes of bathing are best accomplished : in this way there is a depending drain, and, as fluids naturally

naturally descend, the poison is discharged more effectually into the water.—When, in consequence of this, the water becomes foul, it should be changed.

As for the continuance of each bathing, I think, the longer it can be practised, it will be so much the better: as long as it is agreeable to the patient, and while she finds herself relieved thereby, it is certainly doing good, and, therefore, should be continued, if it even extend to some hours.

Although the manner of bathing now proposed is the easiest I could devise, I am aware that it will be disagreeable to some women to be so often and so long confined to it, as may be needful; but it is to be expected that their good sense, together with good advice, and the benefit arising from it, will reconcile every sufferer to submit thereto.

In time of bathing, it will be proper to circulate, or move the water gently in the vessel, without moving the vessel itself: by this management, there will not be always a column of foul water next the ulcer, and while the greater part of it continues fit for use, the fore will have the benefit of the whole before it is thrown away, to make room for what is clean.

To this short treatise, I have added a sketch of a cheap and convenient apparatus for bathing; but, where this cannot be had, others should be used. For instance, if the diseased breast is prominent, a common earthen pot is no despicable thing, and may answer the purpose tolerably well. But when a flat breast is to be bathed, other expedients will be necessary: in this case some very soft linen will be useful, either one piece folded, or different pieces laid smooth upon each other, to a considerable thickness, and so broad as to reach beyond the limits

limits of the ulcer; all these pieces, or the foldings of one piece, should be tacked together, to keep every one in its place: by leave of the reader, I shall call every such parcel of linen a *bather*; which is to be dipped in warm water, then lifted up as full of it as possible, and held to the fore by an assistant. When bathing is performed in this way, the prone posture, before recommended, will not be convenient: in this case, the patient should be seated on a chair, some provision being made to carry off the water*. When there are two or more assistants, a bather may be so laid or managed, as to admit of water being poured from above, and held for a while between it and the ulcer.

After the bathing is over, the breast should be gently dried, and the ulcer dressed directly with the mildest things that can be got. In

See the plate, fig. 3d.

general,

general, a thick mucilage of flax seed will do very well for this purpose, as it is a cooling, kindly application, and over it some soft lint and linen; or some very fine wheat flour, or starch, may be sprinkled into the ulcer: these last named are the safest, and the best means I know, to stop the hæmorrhages in bleeding cancers. These dressings may be easily removed, or they will drop into the water at the next bathing, which should be often repeated, or as soon as the patient finds herself uneasy from the want it.

Of the various medicines which may be applied to cancers in the intervals of bathing, mucilage appears to me to be preferable to every one, for these reasons,—it is perfectly mild, and is, of all things, the most likely to join in immediate contact with the diseased parts, while many other applications are either of no effect, or kept off by the thin acrid fluid that covers them; it unites also with this fluid,
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by which the stimulus thereof is greatly diminished. Mucilage of flax seed is proposed because it is cheap, and is equal, if not superior, to any other for this purpose. For common use, it should be prepared with pure water: sometimes, however, it may be proper to make it with the expressed juice, or decoction, of hemlock;—hemlock itself in substance, likewise camphire, and opium, may be added occasionally.

Cancerous ulcers are often attended with an abominable fætor; they appear of various colours, and have, sometimes, more of the completion of gangrene than of any other disease. In these cases, it may be of use to wash them with a solution of camphire, or of myrrh, in water: I prepare the first by combining the camphire with sweet almonds, and then adding the water; the other in the same way as the lac ammoniaci. Notwithstanding all the appearances of mortification, I am persuaded,

that stronger stimulants will do no real good, but rather induce some greater evil. Under these circumstances, a decoction, or an infusion, of peruvian bark, or bark itself in substance, prepared and taken as the stomach can bear it, will be eminently useful. This medicine will be still further necessary, if in these states of the disease the air is warm or moist; especially if these constitutions of it are united, or frequently succeed to each other; and if, at the same time, putrid diseases are common. Preparations of bark, and a mild nourishing diet, will uphold the vital power, and take off, in a great measure, the lowness and irritation which often prevail.

When the glands in the axilla are much affected, and are not to be removed, it may not be improper to open them, to give some vent to this poison, and then bathe them in water, as a further expedient to free them from it.

In some cases, the irritation of the cancer is extended from the axilla to the arm, with painful swelling and inflammation: to relieve or palliate these, an issue may be made under the apex of the deltoid muscle; and the more effectually to solicit a discharge, and preserve the surrounding parts, the ulcer should be washed or fomented frequently, and dressed oftener than any other issue.

From what was observed before, and what I have seen in other diseases, I am apprehensive, that where there is great anxiety or trouble of mind, very little can be done to remove or alleviate this, till the distressed sufferer is first restored to a state of tranquillity. And, therefore, it will be necessary to use every means, every argument, to rescue our patient from sorrow, but more especially from despair; also to revive and encourage hope, which will be a great relief and comfort to her anxious, drooping, broken heart. If she is brought to be calm,

and chearful, the disease will certainly take some favourable turn, and from one prosperous circumstance concurring with another, her sufferings will be greatly diminished.

That this desirable object may be further promoted, it will be prudent to invite, and introduce to her, all the sensible, chearful company that can be had, and, with them, all proper amusements.

Beside chearfulness, that powerful remedy for many disorders, pure air and cleanliness will be essentially necessary; and, therefore, every woman under this disease, should have her dress, apartments, and bed, perfectly clean, well aired, and dry, as far as possible. When the weather permits, she should go out into the open air, to enjoy the benefit of it: on these occasions, good company, and the various productions of nature, will make the walk a pleasing, a real recreation—they will draw off
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the attention from fear and sorrow, which must otherwise aggravate all her misery.

In these cases, it will be necessary to pay a particular regard to diet, as great mischief may arise from indigestion, from stimulating substances, and from acid or putrescent acrimony : when any disorder from these is discovered, it should be speedily removed, by the mildest and most-approved means.

The state of the alimentary canal demands likewise particular attention, to prevent such evils as may arise from costiveness, or purging. To obviate the first, a mild cathartic will be useful occasionally. In regard to the other, if a diarrhœa happens to take place, and no cause can be discovered, it should be considered as an effort of nature, to evacuate from the system something that is hurtful—possibly fluids vitiated by the cancer, and derived from the general mass into the cavity of the intestines. And, there-

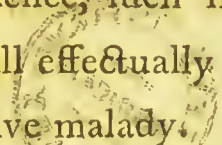
therefore, the patient should be advised, to assist every such effort, by drinking plentifully of mild watery fluids, or pure water itself, to dilute, and wash out of the body, the stimulating acrimony; at the same time, it will be necessary to administer such medicines as are proper, to defend those parts from the irritation thereof: in this view, I should prefer to every thing, a mild vegetable mucilage, combined with bland oil, as in the arabic emulsion, but with these ingredients in a much larger proportion than usual. If the discharge is uncommonly offensive, and the patient is not sunk thereby, it should be suffered to continue, while there is reason to believe it is salutary. But, on the first appearance of debility, or if there was great relaxation previous to the purging, it should be restrained, and gradually suppressed: in this case, astringents will be useful: opiates, and mucilaginous glysters, will also be serviceable, to diminish or take off the irritation that keeps up the purging. Opiates will not only be useful

ful in this intention, but often be necessary to alluage pain, and to calm or compose the patient to rest.—Beside these few short hints, which I considered as necessary for accidents occurring in this, as an external disease, much more may be said in regard to the internal treatment; but this I leave to the gentlemen in the province of medicine.

Cancers sometimes take place in habits affected with other diseases; when these occur, beside what is proposed in general, each one will require some particular treatment suitable to her particular disorder. In these complicated cases, the various morbid affections require great attention, and some of them may escape the most accurate observer; therefore, I shall esteem it proper, where I am concerned, to have the advice and concurrence of other practitioners.

To conclude:—As this is addressed to the
candid

candid and humane, who are disposed to hear, and willing to practise, what is likely to be useful, there is reason to expect, that, under their direction, the intention of it will be fully accomplished. I am also in hope, that, by their ingenuity, and by further exertions, with more experience, such improvements will be made as shall effectually remove this painful and destructive malady.



F I N I S.